

ABC WORLD NEWS TONIGHT

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JENNINGS: We hear fairly often in the course of a year of people who've defected from one place to another. A defector who suddenly pops up back home again is more unusual, especially when home is the Soviet Union. Today in Moscow, one Oleg Bitov met with Western reporters. He had a tale of kidnapping and brainwashing to tell. ABC's Walter Rodgers was there.

RODGERS: The Soviets called this news conference to show you can go home again. Oleg Bitov, a high-ranking Russian journalist, had been given political asylum in Britain after disappearing from the Venice Film Festival a year ago. Bitov had been living in London, writing articles highly critical of the Soviet Union, but then last month he mysteriously disappeared again. Today, Bitov resurfaced in Moscow, now claiming he never defected to the West. Rather he claims he was blackmailed, drugged and kidnapped by British intelligence agents last September. VOICE\OF\TRANSLATOR\FOR\OLEG\BITOV: They hit me on the back of my head. When I came to in the morning, my will was paralyzed. I couldn't remember anything.

RODGERS: The British say the kidnap stories are absurd, but Bitov gave the addresses of these state houses in England where he claims British agents alternately promised to make him a major general or kill him. Ultimately the Soviet journalist says he won the confidence of his captors and was allowed to travel in Britain and in America. He categorically denied Soviet agents forced him to return home. His friends in London doubt the story they heard in Moscow today.

DUFF\HART-DAVIS (journalist): They are preposterous lies, I mean they are fantastic lies, which he must know as well as I do.

RODGERS: Bitov never explained his sudden mysterious disappearance from London last month, nor why he left behind \$50,000. But willingly or otherwise, the Russians got their man back. Walter Rodgers, ABC News, Moscow.